

FEMALE EDUCATION.

It is a good sign of the advance of society when attention is paid to the education of women. The youth of the other sex commonly monopolize all the care of a rude people, and the female child is left to acquire as she may the little menial arts, which are to be her perpetual and exclusive employment. And even when war and the chase have given place to intellectual pursuits, it is long before woman reaps the advantage. Her beauty is still considered her sole claim to regard, and her mind is thought incapable of culture, or not worth the pains.

The increased attention bestowed upon female improvement is a proof of the superiority of the modern to the ancient civilized world. We hear of one or two gifted women in Greece and Rome,—of Sappho, and of Aspasia, and of Portia; but the generality were consigned to the dust, and were never thought of in connexion with any more elevated employment.

One might almost say, at present, that the error lies in the contrary extreme: not that too much thought or pains can be bestowed on female education, but that too much is sometimes attempted in it, and too much expected from it. Education is indeed very influential, but it cannot do every thing. It may mould, but it seldom transforms character; it may evoke, but it cannot originate; it improves, but it does not create.—And, as with regard to religion, education can do nothing without a higher influence; so, in other respects, its operation will be much affected by constitutional bias and natural capacity.

However contrary to the theory of some, it is very evident that there is an innate moral and intellectual bias, which contributes greatly to the formation of individual character. It is in the mind as in the body; there is a peculiarity in each which no training can take away, which is observable, not only in those pre-eminently distinguished, but in all. For all have their peculiar aspect, as well as their general resemblance; and we need not be indebted to physiognomical or phrenological science for a truth which experience and observation sufficiently discover.

It is, perhaps, one of the faults of modern education, and especially of that of women, that this difference is sometimes overlooked. There are now a system and a routine, to which every girl must be subjected. A few years ago, this was by some extended even to bodily discipline; and we have heard of delicate females being sent out with their brothers with perforated shoes, that they might be inured to hardships, which they would probably in after life never have to encounter.

The folly of such conduct was evident from its results: it was a mania that lasted only for a while (till *Emile* was forgotten); but it is easier to discern a physical than a moral error, and much easier, too, to correct it.

We may often see instances of a similar mistake in the intellectual treatment of young people of the present day, especially in matters of mere taste. Yet, in these, we must allow that nature is peculiarly arbitrary. There are some who can see no beauty in a *Claude*,—there are others who can hear, unmoved, the death-song of *Weber*; still music and painting are deemed so essential, that every young woman must handle a pencil, or strike the harp. How many a poor girl is, in this way, doomed to symphonize three or four hours every day, to play without an ear, and to sing without a voice; and, after many years of irksome drudgery, to discover that her soul was not tuned to harmony, and that all her meritorious exertions cannot supply natural defects.

Music and drawing are very delightful, but they are surely not essential. A woman may be very good, very clever, very pleasing, without them; nay, much more pleasing than when she is, as it were, forced into their service, and made to affect a taste.—For then there will be a perpetual display of some laboured studio, or some double octave bravura, the only merit of which is its painful execution. And for a woman to play and draw only a little, is equally distressing to her friends and to herself; for they are constrained to admire, and she to execute, in spite of the consciousness of insincerity on the one hand, and of failure on the other.

The loss of time which these useless efforts involve is, perhaps, their least evil. To force the inclination in things indifferent has a bad moral effect. Constrained studies are seldom successful; and, frequently, the error is universal, and pervades the system. Certain things are to be acquired, certain rules observed, whatever be the ability, taste, or temper. Natural inferiority, instead of feeling itself assisted, is, not unfrequently, wholly discouraged by this unbending routine; and the innate and peculiar talent, if such there be, languishes for want of culture. Still more lamentable is the effect on disposition. How often is irritability the consequence of wounded sensitiveness; and how often does the severity which may be requisite to restrain the impetuous, freeze and paralyze the diffident and tender! Many a gentle spirit has been crushed; many a feeling heart chilled; many an amiable disposition rendered fretful and peevish, by a want of sympathy in instructors.

It would be far more wise to study the peculiarities of temper and talent, and to adapt our treatment accordingly. It is surely not desirable that the characters of all young women should be as uniform as is their hand-writing; and it is as absurd to attempt universal conformity of mind as it is of mode. To make no allowance for moral and intellectual difference is, indeed, a greater mistake than for a little woman to adopt a French coiffure, or a plain woman a conspicuous dress, merely in compliance with fashion.

On the other hand, how much may be effected by a tender and judicious treatment! How may the timid be encouraged, and the languid stimulated, and the latent spark of genius fanned! How may even the dull be roused to exertion, and be made to feel, at least, sympathy, in what is refined and intellectual!

Adaptation is, indeed, the great secret in education; adaptation to circumstances as well as to character, and, one might almost say, to inclination, as well as to ability. For, though there is a danger in over-indulgence in this respect, there is even more danger in over-restraint; and if the favourite exercise of the mind be not prejudicial, it is surely better to encourage and direct than to thwart it. It is, as in the choice of a profession,—few rise to eminence whose wishes are counteracted,—so few attain proficiency in that to which they are strongly disinclined. And though this may be but an excuse for indolence, and, of course, must, in such cases, be overruled, it may, too, be an intuitive instinct, whose intimations, at least, merit attention. For as the appetite often points out what the stomach will bear, so the taste often indicates what the intellect will master.

The education of women should, of course, be strictly feminine. Yet this affects more the manner than the matter of instruction; for it is not so much what is taught, as the way in which it is taught, and the use made of it, that determines character. Knowledge, in itself, has no tendency to make a woman un-

feminine, any more than it has to make a man proud; but it is the self-sufficiency which is sometimes instilled as its accompaniment, which produces assumption and conceit in the one case, and arrogance in the other.

Perfect acquirement demands time and application; and it has this good effect, that while it satisfies and fires the mind, it does not cheat it into a false estimate of its own powers. On the contrary, superficial knowledge dazzles by the rapidity of its attainment; and while it impresses us with a notion of our own superiority, leads us to despise those who have travelled by slower steps. It is thus that young women sometimes entertain an overweening idea of their own talents.—They are, as the phrase is, well-educated; that is, they have been taught a great many things, and they think to impress others with the same opinion of their proficiency with which they delude themselves.

It is, indeed, no wonder that young women should be so very clever now-a-days. There are so many helps to learning, and steps to Parnassus; there are so many pioneers to level the way, that it is a libel any longer to call it steep. If grammar be dry and abstruse, its necessity is superseded; if the dictionary be irksome, there is the interlined translation; if the classic author be obscure and ponderous, there is the lucid paraphrase, and the elegant abridgement. Be the nut ever so hard, the kernel is extracted. Our very babies may suck the sweets of Froissart, Robertson, and Hume, and follow with infantile curiosity the retreat of the Ten Thousand.

Youth is now such a very busy time: there are so many languages that must be learnt; so many accomplishments that must be mastered; so many sciences with which we must be familiar. A little while ago, French was a rare acquirement; but what girl now does not sigh with Filicaja, or weep with Klopstock! The versatility of female talent is, indeed, abundantly improved. Master succeeds to master, and class to class. The day of the scholar, like that of the instructor, is parcelled out into hours; and the sixth portion of each, which is cribbed by the former to run to a new pupil, is not unfrequently all that is allowed to the latter to prepare for a new teacher.

It is well that mechanics can assist; that the inclination of the hand may be given by the chiroplast, and the intricacies of time defined by a pendulum, and the problems of perspective resolved by a lens. Could the modern school-room be preserved like the saloons of Pompeii, it might pass in succeeding centuries for a refined inquisition. There would be found stocks for the fingers, and pulleys for the neck, and weights and engines of suspicious form and questionable purpose; and, in spite of all our vaunts of philanthropy, we might pass in future ages for the inventors of ingenious tortures.

But for what end is all this apparatus? It is certainly very right that knowledge should be simplified, that the child of the nineteenth century should profit by its illumination, and that little girls, instead of poring out their eyes at embroidered frames, should be treated as moral and intelligent beings. But where there is such over-feeding, is it possible that there can be digestion? Where there is such an anxiety to impart brilliancy, is it not for display rather than for use?

It is quite different with boys. They are still kept, for the most part, to their old drudgery: they must still fight their way through classic lore, through crabbed grammars, and corrupt texts; they must still go to Aristotle for logic, to Newton for science, to Thucydides and to Livy for history; and though they are assisted in their difficult path by the labours of past and present generations, they must still work hard before they can reap the fruit. And better far that they should do so; that they should encounter the flag of the student before they can carry off the glory of the scholar.

It would be well if the same principle were acted on with regard to girls; if their education were more solid and less flashy, and if, instead of tipping like butterflies at every flower, they laid in a store of useful learning for future use. For it is not to glitter in a sunbeam, and display a ceaseless variety of gay and gaudy colours, that woman should be educated, but to occupy her station with grace, and to fulfil its duties with humility.

Yet this is often too much forgotten in the whirl of employments which constitute the education of many young women. They are allowed no time to think; they acquire mechanically; and the object proposed to them is, not the satisfaction resulting from knowledge, nor its intrinsic value, but to outvie their competitors, and to shine in society.

A little girl is in this way often, from her infancy, trained to exhibit. She competes for the prize in the morning concert, and glitters in a silver medal, the envy of her class. In the evening she shows off to an admiring circle, and her little heart dances time to her fingers, as she listens to the applauding whispers which her execution evokes. Her infantile sketches lie upon her mother's table; and when she is summoned from her school-room, it is to play her last concerto to Mrs. A., or to show her portfolio to Mrs. B.; and can we wonder that the same habits should continue? *Monsieur Aoste* will, indeed, seldom incommode her; she may think it interesting to affect a tremor, or she may be really disturbed when a more gifted competitor carries off the palm; but her own success will ever be her object, and she will be continually on the lookout for opportunities of display. Good sense or natural diffidence may correct the error; but if the modest blush ever mantle in her cheek, if she ever shrinks from exhibition, it is not her education which is in fault.

May we not to this system ascribe many of the errors of future conduct? May we not trace its effects in the different developments of female vanity? Exhibition becomes a habit which is not easily thrown aside; and its desire must, in some way or other, be gratified. It not unfrequently continues even when a better principle has been infused, and leads even religious women to step out of their sphere, and to be as ambitious of display on spiritual subjects as others are on worldly ones; and this it is that sometimes makes them not unwilling to be themselves the propagators of new opinions, for they are more anxious to attract attention than scrupulous as to the means of doing so. It is hard to give up what we have been from our infancy accustomed to, to forego a cordial which has been so perpetually administered, to be content with a quiet fulfilment of duties which bring with them no notoriety, when we have been always fed by the stimulus of praise. Yet such duties are a woman's province, and for these she should be educated. It is no more desirable that she should shine in religious debate than that she should glitter in a gay assembly; and if the latter be vain or unprofitable, the former is unsuitable and unfeminine.

But we are too apt to overlook the end of education,—that it is the formation of character, not the mere acquirement of knowledge, that is its legitimate purpose.

What a woman knows is comparatively of little importance to what a woman is. Let her mind be enlarged, and her information accurate; let her excel, if possible, in all that she does attempt, and we would find no fault with her if her accomplishments be but few.

How delightful it is to meet with such an one, whose mind is well stored with useful information, who is capable of tasting intellectual beauty, and of deciding with discretion in the emergencies of life, and who is, withal, destitute of pretension. And, on

the contrary, what a sad specimen of folly it is, when a young woman is taught all conceivable accomplishments, and when their very number precludes the possibility of proficiency in any. She can trace Chinese figures in black and white, sketch butterflies in Indian tinting, accomplish a few romances on the guitar, a few waltzes on the piano-forte; she talks bad French, and worse Italian; but she has no taste, no love of knowledge, no real desire for improvement; her mind is a mere blank; she might as well have been employed (like her grandmothers of old) in copying receipts in half-text, or working Adam and Eve upon a sampler.

It is the same in every thing. Lessons are considered the sum of education. And though it is certainly very right to have a *memoria technica* for dates, and a rhyme for the signs of the zodiac, there is more to be learnt in history than facts, and in science than terms. It is the use and application of knowledge that demands our chief attention.

What a mistake is the system we complain of with regard to religion! Yet, even in serious families, there is often too much of dry routine in religious instruction. It is communicated too much as a task, which is to be learnt, repeated, and then thrown aside. Whereas the principle should pervade every thing. Religion should be the star to gild the young child's path, and to give zest even to her little pleasures. It should be the sunbeam to warm her tender heart, and cause it to expand towards its Creator. It should be the spring, the paramount influence, the guide, the incentive. It should be inculcated with all the affectionate sympathy of its Divine teacher, and applied with all that gentle earnestness which wins and subdues the infant mind, and chains it with the cords of love to its instructor.

We may make the Bible a class-book, and weary our children with Scripture, but we shall never make them love religion in this way. The probability is, that when the school-room trammels are thrown off, they will throw aside its instructions, and will scarcely think themselves fully emancipated till they have forgotten all that was taught there.

Youth is the season for fixing habits. We are very careful that our children should acquire no awkward tricks, that their figures should be correctly modelled, their manners well formed, and their movements gracefully regulated; but we are not always sufficiently careful as to the habitual tone and temper of their minds. Yet do we not find that the propensities that are the soonest acquired are always the most inveterate, and that the bias, the taste, the complexion, the temperament, are, for the most part, determined in very early years?

To induce the love as well as the habit of occupation—to excite an interest, at the same time that we accustom to study,—should be our continual endeavour; and, whilst we deprecate the charlatanism that would teach every thing by cards and counters, we should relieve, as much as possible, the irksomeness of the task. And this can only be done by being ourselves in earnest. Nothing is so infectious as enthusiasm of all kinds, and especially to young people.—Children naturally imbibe the feelings of their parents. The little girl who is brought up in the country, and who sees those around her interested in its occupations, dreams of snow-drops and primroses, and thinks no plaything so delightful as a spade and a parterre; and, in like manner, if she is sure that her instructors themselves care for her progress, if she can believe that they sympathize with her, she naturally shares in their ardour, and almost intuitively acquires whatever they may wish to teach.

We may learn, in this, from our Divine instructor. He became man that he might teach men; and we must identify ourselves with our children, if we would

gain their interest; we must condescend to their little emotions—sympathize in their simple impressions, recall our own young feelings, and live over again our early years, if we would mould them to our wishes, and make them regard us as their friends. Nor does this require so much devotion as might be imagined. Some mothers err a little in this respect. One would scarcely find fault with a parent for giving up too much time to her children; yet children are not the only objects of a mother's regard, and by her making them so, she may, in some measure, defeat her own wishes. The probability is, that she will render them selfish and dependent, and disqualify them from coping with those who have been nurtured with less tenderness. For, as the skilful gardener knows when it is better that nature should do her own work, so does the judicious parent feel that children should sometimes be left to try their own strength, and should neither expect nor need assistance.

It is the fault not merely of indulgent, but of over-anxious parents, to treat their children too much as first objects. This is evident from their earliest years; and the little creatures are very quick at discerning their own importance. Their sayings repeated, their talents lauded, their pleasures studied. They are suffered to interrupt and to interfere; and, though we cannot, perhaps, say that they are rude, we must feel that they are very troublesome; and where this treatment is pursued in childhood, it is generally continued in adolescence. The young people are the perpetual theme; their success is blazoned as if it were without precedent—and we are wearied with hearing of their prizes or their prospects. Yet all this must have a very bad effect upon their future character; for they soon fancy themselves all that their partial friends imagine—and then they must either learn a bitter lesson from a harsh and censorious world, or prop themselves up in their own good opinion by an extra portion of conceit.

It is, of course, the first care of religious parents to prepare their children for their eternal state; but it is by fitting them to fill their relations here that they will best educate them for immortality. Besides the mere communication of religious truth, of what importance is it to regulate the temper, and to direct the mind!—How many pious persons have cause to regret their own inconsistencies—the consequence, perhaps, of irritability contracted in childhood, which, in maturer years, it is very difficult to correct. How often have they to lament their own inertness, the natural effect of early indulgence, which wastes and deadens the intellectual faculties, and disqualifies them for future effort. And though they may struggle against such evils, and by Divine Grace may be able to overcome them, they always find that bad habits are their worst enemies, and that it is much more easy to discern than to correct them.

Amiability, intelligence, and an absence of affectation, are the most delightful features in female character; and those which, next to religious principle, it is the business of education to impart. And if we would wish our children to be loved as well as admired, and esteemed as well as loved—if we would render them happy here, to fit them against the changes of life, and fit them for its close, we must endeavour to engraft these qualities upon the solid basis of Christian truth. Religious parents will, of course, always look to a higher influence, and will feel the inadequacy of all human effort; but they will, nevertheless, diligently sow the seed, in humble hope; or rather, in full assurance that it will be watered from above.

It was the boast of Lucullus that he changed his climate with the birds of passage. How often must he have felt the truth here inculcated, that the master of many houses has no home!